

Pseudo Taxonomy -
Family Paramountora; genus species Starus Trekis
Family A. Deckerora; genus species Starus Traksis
Family M. Meneksora; genus species BorgusSpaceis

Borg vs. Borg

The Federation ship disintegrated under the intense hail of phasers, unable to escape because of the trio of tractor beams gripping the hull. A converted merchant freighter attempted a strafing run of quantum torpedoes, but it was quickly and graphically demonstrated that despite upgraded shielding, civilian ships were not constructed to withstand military might. The explosion was spectacular, if short-lived. Although both nacelles were sheared off, the Federation ship continued to try to engage the cube. Another phaser volley punched a hole in primary and auxiliary bridges, leading to a second brilliant fireball.

No enemies were left, Exploratory-class Cube #347 was victorious!

Weapons disengaged his hierarchy from the simulation. While the other members of the cube complained about surveying empty systems in search of species #8511 or lost themselves in local archives looking for obscure entertainment which hadn't been scrubbed from the system by the Greater Consciousness, he ran battle scenarios.

The scenarios often prominently featured Federation ships, if only because that was one of the primary simulations the Collective designed in preparation for eventual assimilation. That day was years, if not nearly a century away, when the Borg expanded their space into the Alpha quadrant, and it was extremely unlikely the imperfectly assimilated of Cube #347 would be employed in fighting, but one could always hope. Besides the satisfaction of blowing things up, Weapons liked the smooth feeling of the simulations where the crew acted as One. The knowledge that reality was currently boring and pretend death not permanent was conducive to the attitudes which made the scenarios work. Too bad real life action with the cube didn't work out as well.

Weapons had the theory that if he pounded enough battle situations into the drones of his hierarchy, they would eventually act with the instinct which was a necessary step towards Oneness, with himself head, of course. It was also useful in the simulations that he didn't have to deal with the 3400 other drones of the cube whom were outside his hierarchy and would occasionally seize local subsection control of weaponry.

The break in the simulation allowed Weapons to catch up on current events. He always knew in the background what was going on, as did every other drone, but it took a back burner to blowing up Federation doppelgangers. The last three days had been uneventful, to say the least, as the cube was in a transwarp conduit between system twenty-three and twenty-four of the twenty-seven system search. Reality digested, Weapons' hierarchy began programming the parameters of the next battle.

The shock of the Greater Consciousness initiating contact with Cube #347 was great. Four thousand drones were drawn into the combined mentalities of trillions. The touch of Oneness was brief, however, just long enough to download instructions for a short side trip to rendezvous with Exploratory-class Cube #752. This sub-collective was to pick up a new imperfectly assimilated drone and integrate her into their consciousness. Weapons felt Captain send acknowledgment as the Greater Collective turned attention to another concern. Elsewhere in the local net, Sensors brought into active memory star charts with which to plot the course to

the coordinates; and finally Captain sent the command codes to alter the heading of the cube.

The meeting with Cube #752 was brief, the other sub-collective avoiding all but the most superficial linking of ship systems, mediated primarily through Captain. Greetings were swiftly exchanged, the new drone beamed to an assimilation workshop, and then parting accomplished with Cube #752 revving up engines into high transwarp and streaking off. Sometimes being the pariah of the Collective meant having the distinct impression that one took a shower but forgot to put on deodorant afterwards...and it turned out to be a scorcher of a day.

Excitement over, Weapons was about to restart his war games when Captain called, {Weapons. The new drone belongs to you. Go get up.}

{Me? I thought Delta was looking to fill out her hierarchy a bit more,} whined Weapons, trying to get out of actual responsibility.

{Her dossier indicates a personality more suited for weapons.} Captain sent the drone's background information. Weapons had to admit the drone in her prior existence had liked to blow things up.

{Understood.} Weapons put the simulation on hold, allowing his hierarchy additional time to talk over desired objectives and possible tactics to use in certain situations. He activated the transporter and beamed over to Assimilation Workshop #2.

The assimilation workshop was an actual room. Granted there were no doors and five corridors terminated at the area, but the roughly hexagonal large space was more roomlike than a typical nodal intersection. A pair of workbenches/beds were in the center of the room underneath a virtual torture rack of instruments used for the preparation of newly assimilated drones. Alcoves lined the walls, much more complex than the normal type; and blinking lights and readout terminals were situated at eye level by each alcove. All were empty but one. Before he went to claim the new drone, Weapons looked about for Assimilation.

Assimilation was watching a wall, upon which were several stripes of paint, each a different subtle shade of gray. As Weapons watched, Assimilation sighed, which was eerily echoed from the local walkways as nearby members of the hierarchy reacted in synch. Weapons was slightly weirded out...no, he was quite weirded out. He had known that this hierarchy was headed by a depressed drone (who didn't, as everyone could feel it though the net), but had never experienced it face to face.

Weapons cleared his throat, "The new drone?"

Assimilation pointed without looking up, "Over there. The other cube properly prepared her body with implants and prostheses for a tactical position, but her mind has not been allowed consciousness beyond a basic subspace connection to the Collective. Contamination of individuality must be limited, you know. In other words, she has absolutely no idea where she is and has not been given a Borg designation yet. On the bright side, nanite programming is complete and she will accept her lot in life as a drone. No Locutus fiasco here."

"Understood." Weapons paused, then asked, "What are you doing?" The whole conversation had taken place with Assimilation staring intently at the paint.

"Watching the paint dry, of course. Everyone knows how boring it is to travel between these empty systems, and so my entertainment is gleaned comparing drying times between different shades of hull paint."

Weapons decided not to comment, especially as one of the unison sighs happened again. Instead he turned and went to the new member of his hierarchy. The drone was a typical humanoid specimen, told apart externally by the vertical nose ridges which ran up to her

forehead...as much forehead as was visible under implants, that is. Other than that, she was clothed in the typical body suit, had the normal prostheses and implants, and the skin was a healthy mottled gray. Weapons dropped into the net, feeling the unconscious mind sleeping in stasis. Reviewing the list of open designations, he selected one, then began the awakening process.

The drone woke up, her eyes opening and her mind questing out on the local net, instinctively attempting to integrate itself with the rest of the sub-collective. Weapons quickly introduced himself and other vital information. He wanted to get this done and back to his simulations. In the background he could hear his hierarchy coming up with what were frankly impossible battle situations.

"I am 45 of 300, also subdesignated Weapons. I am head of the weaponry hierarchy. You will be 89 of 300, also of the weapons hierarchy. This is Exploratory-class Cube #347 and we are embarked on a boring and fairly useless assignment, when we could be blowing things up. Ready to go? Good. Activate transporter and go to subsection 19, submatrix 4. Your alcove assignment is being downloaded now."

The drone, now 89 of 300, stood there blankly, growing confusion evident as she digested the information. She finally managed to disengage umbilicals and clamps to step down onto the floor of the room itself. Opening her mouth, 89 of 300 croaked out the words, "Huh? Please slow down, we do not understand."

Sighing, Weapons closed his eyes. He had hoped to shuffle 89 of 300 off as fast as possible to her alcove and immerse her into scenarios. Unfortunately, the signs of assimilation imperfection were strong (questioning orders being one of the major symptoms), despite the "we", and that was a habit programmed in by the nanites which was easily broken. He tried again.

"89 of 300 is your designation. Go to your alcove assignment in subsection 19, submatrix 4. There you will have the time to pursue your questions. There is work to be done. You are Borg, and as your hierarchical head, you will obey me. And if you obey me, we will all be blowing things up shortly.

"Oh, and as Captain says, 'Can that plural crap.'"

Bemused and still quite confused, 89 of 300 did as Weapons said, beaming herself to the appropriate catwalk. Weapons followed suit, transporting himself back to the alcove he called home.

Weapons sighed as he settled in his alcove, closing his eyes and linking firmly into the net. Home sweet home. He gave the new drone little thought, although he could feel her tentatively reaching out, instinctively bringing information from the archives into her active memory, and generally integrating herself into the sub-collective. The cube was back enroute to system twenty-four of the search, and so it was time to continue the battle scenarios. Weapons gathered the consensus for the next game, then loaded the simulation generator program.

{Welcome to BorgCraft, the most intensely realistic galaxy conquest simulation to be produced by Flurry, subsidiary #23 of Borg Software Enterprises,} quipped the computer. Background techno-symphony music played the BorgCraft theme as a cube whooshed across the opening screen. The scene pulled back to display a spiral galaxy overlaid by the green words of "BorgCraft." The program continued, {Would you like to replay opening credits, load a saved game, begin a new simulation, or devise a custom scenario?}

Weapons selected custom scenario. The program now began asking a series of questions,

each of which Weapons swiftly answered.

{Objective? Acquire new technologies, assimilation, total destruction, planetary assault....}

{Random,} interrupted Weapons.

{Enemy?} Next followed a long list of species numerical designations, concluded by several multi-special empires, regimes, and confederations.

{Federation.}

{Starting assets?}

{One Exploratory-class cube, full drone compliment.}

Other parameters?}

{No background music; cheat codes disabled.}

{Setting up simulation now. Objective is to destroy the Federation shipyard at Denub Prime.}

The opening scenes disintegrated as primary sensory and net input was superseded by the game, mimicking the actual conditions the sub-collective (at least Weapons' hierarchy) would experience. Space sped by as the cube hurried through transwarp. The game was begun.

{This is stupid. Does anyone else think this is stupid?} stated 89 of 300 for the third time in the last ten minutes. {We are playing a game, blowing up fake ships in situations we will never see. What is the point?}

Weapons growled, {Quiet, 89 of 300. You are disrupting the /battle scenario/, not game. And the point is readiness and instant reflexes.}

{There are six hundred drones in this hierarchy. I'm sure among all the augmented brains, excluding certain members, of course, there is enough room to keep /useful/ situations on file. A lone cube, especially this one, deep in Federation space isn't going to happen in our immediate future,} contritely returned 89 of 300. Unfortunately for Weapons, some of the hierarchy were starting to be swayed in her direction, lending weight to her arguments.

In the simulation, the consequences of the bickering were becoming evident. Two patrol ships, fast frigates, were locked in combat with Cube #347. One was tractored and being swiftly demolished, while the second limped on thrusters as it continued to toss quantum torpedoes. Both ships should have already been destroyed. To make matters worse, radio contact had not been jammed as swiftly as it should have been, and a call for help had been sent.

A large ship came powering in from the direction ship yard which was still one AU distant, locked in orbit about the system's largest gas giant. As its hull signature and markings became clear enough to be identified through the fog of war, Weapon's hope for victory was deflated. It was the Enterprise. Typically nothing less than a fully integrated Battle-class cube could hope to go up against the Enterprise. An Exploratory-class cube with serious identity and leadership problems was so much tissue paper to punch through.

Five minutes later, an inevitable screen popped up as the simulation drained from the senses of the hierarchy: {Game over. Federation wins. Do you wish you try again?} The movie of Cube #347 blowing up was automatically replayed three agonizing times from three different angles.

Four scenarios later, all of which ended in an increasingly predictable manner, Weapons was becoming incensed. It was obvious 89 of 300 had her eye on the Weapons' position; she already had over a third of the hierarchy siding with her on her views, which subsequently

affected battle as those drones primarily followed her intentions. Much of the rest of the cube had taken time from their own activities to watch the infighting, and several bets at various odds were circulating the intranets. The efficiency of Weapons' hierarchy was down in the dumps to say the least.

{It is your problem, Weapons,} stated Captain when Weapons had complained. {I think twenty-seven Cycles of holding your position has made you forget that it is supposed to be a lottery. Now you know what the drones you scream at each assignment beginning feel like when you inform them you are the one and only Weapons. I'm not getting involved.} And so Captain, and every other drone for that matter, had withdrawn themselves from the controversy.

89 of 300 was talking with Weapons again, {It is not so much the blowing things up...it is the senseless way you do it. No tactics. No overall strategy. Aim and shoot is the limit of your thoughts.}

{There is danger to overthinking the problem.}

{Not in overthinking...it is the not thinking at all that is the problem. You may be trying to train for "instinct", but battle is more than base reflex. Why can't you get it through that thick skull of yours?}

{And I have the same sentiments about your ideas.}

And so continued the quarrel for the next several cycles, neither side gaining. When Cube #347 finally entered system twenty-four of the search, Weapons was still ahead in hierarchy loyalty. Just barely.

Weapons listened to the chatter between Sensors and Captain. None of the five planets or their moons had shown signs of habitation by a space-faring race, but interesting signals were emanating from an asteroid located at a Trojan point for the largest gas giant. Captain sent the cube towards the area to investigate.

As the ship neared, Weapons slid into the sensor grid in order to more closely monitor the approach. He had been vindicated less than an hour earlier when Captain had ordered 89 of 300 and her splinter group to accommodate themselves with the majority, at least until the system was searched. The final sorting of whom would be Weapons would have to wait. Despite the command, Weapons could still feel 89 of 300 subtly attempting to align others to her mental signature.

Sensors was now initiating active probing with the sensors. Odd frequencies were in use, ones not normally utilized. After Weapons had a brief sensation of tasting something oily, he backed slightly away from the grid...he had meshed himself a little too much with the non-humanoid's point of view. The extremely putrid sensation which followed prompted Weapons to want to gag, but he suddenly found himself unable to move.

< You have an interesting mind. Very basic. Lovely areas of simplicity. Nothing too complicated. I want you. >

A flash of bright light momentarily blinded Weapons. When it cleared, he found himself not in his alcove, but standing in the middle of a vast place, the walls of which were either too far away to be seen or were nonexistent. Weapons stumbled before catching his balance, turning around in a circle to gauge his location. The area was not quite empty: 89 of 300 stood nearby, confusion evident on her face.

< Welcome beings! > came a disembodied voice directly into the mind of the two drones. < Welcome, welcome! I'm sorry I had to do this to you, but I don't get the chance to play with animate, linear matter too often. The thesis I'm writing requires some sentient experimentation,

and unfortunately the location I set up for my lab is not close to those areas more frequented by corporal creatures. There are other excellent reasons for this locale, but there are some drawbacks to living in the boonies. At this rate it will take several thousand years to complete my research...buuut, as my mentor said, you gotta take the bad with the good. >

Weapon's connection with Cube #347, and the Collective in general, was odd. There was a definite link, but no information or impressions flowed in either direction. 89 of 300's mental signature was similarly muted, although to not as great as a degree.

"Where...." started 89 of 300.

"Who...." began Weapons at the same moment.

< Where, what, who, why, and how, I believe the sequence goes. Elementary problem processing of linear, sentient creatures. Wonderful! Already excellent information is being gleaned from your presence! > A distinct impression of a clearing throat followed before the voice continued. < This where is a fractal reality held between units of time of the macrouniverse. It is not much, but I call it home, at least for now. I can take all the time I need to perform my studies here without waiting for lag times in my experiments, some of which may otherwise last thousands of years. Essentially this is your perception of a moment between times. >

< What and who are more easily answered together. I am a scholarly member - professional student I have been called from time to time - of an energy race who developed in the fields of a vast galactic black hole quite a distance from this one. My name is meaningless unless you can manipulate the energy signatures of gamma rays as they whirl in the outskirts of a singularity. Therefore I've picked a name from a corporal species I once came across and which I liked enough to take a few centuries making preliminary studies for future research. You may call me Bob. >

< Why? It is evident by now, and I can read it in your brain processing that you both know it. You two are perfect for a short series of experiments I have planned to further my research. >

< Finally is how. How is much more complicated, and it would take too long, even in this place, to explain it. Suffice to say that during my species' evolution, in the harsh and improbable environment that it took place in, the need to escape extinction relied heavily on the ability to finely manipulate the physics of space and time. I'm not one of those conceited beings known as Q, mind you, several of which have more than once messed with my research for a whim. I'm a native of this universe, not some persistent left-over from five Big Crunches back. > The last statement was said with a hint of hostility.

< Oh, and don't worry about your ship. I know you space-faring beings who use mechanical conveyances often get antsy when they have been removed from their transport. You will be returned in such a manner that no one will miss your presence. > Bob hummed to itself, < Well, there is that artificial-built hive mind bit to contend with, but there will be no lasting effects. To keep you both somewhat sane, I've taken the liberty to route the subspace signal into this fractal reality. However, as we are temporally traveling forwards while subjectively your native universe is frozen, I'm sure the link you both maintain is a bit stale. Your minds indicate you will survive the discomfort. >

Bob, exceedingly chatty, continued on, jumping from subject to subject. When he embarked upon a ranting tangent about a certain Q who had disrupted a millennia of exacting observations approximately twenty thousand years prior, Weapons discovered that if he walked in any one direction he could return to his starting place within ten minutes. The bodiless voice

was always present at a constant conversational volume, ignoring the actions of the Borg. When 89 of 300 sashayed off with Weapons standing still, one could watch how she quickly disappeared in the distance, only to reappear in the opposite horizon seconds later. There was absolutely no perception of distance in this place; and no color other than white beyond the gray, black, and silver of the Borg themselves.

< Enough about me...let me tell you what will be happening in a short time from now. When I looked in your ship, your minds caught my attention with their opposing natures of conflict. Quite strong contention of disagreement, if I do say so myself. In addition, there was a novel, if primitive, computer simulation, BorgCraft the name was, in the top levels of your ship's general memory. Imagine...still using quantum binary-based machines! >

< Anyway, since the program is a familiar medium for you two, I've taken the liberty to make a few modifications and set it to running on a low-powered virtual field computer I had lying around in another fractal dimension. I'm amazed I even found it at all in that pigsty I maintain. During the course of the set of simulations I've designed, of which you two will be competing for a similar objective, I will be closely monitoring the differing styles of problem solving which drew me to your minds in the first place. >

Both Weapons and 89 of 300 were too stunned to protest. Finally 89 of 300 spoke up, "Have we no input in the matter? And what is to keep us from merging to work in concert as Borg should do?"

< Excellent and intelligent questions! > lauded the invisible Bob. < As you are subjects, I'm sorry, but you do not have much input. It is not allowed in the protocol. As far as working together...well...two reasons why that won't happen. First is the artificial subspace link I've set up is limited. You will be able to talk to each other and see what the other is doing, but the physical influencing and ordering of others that you enjoy in your ship is not allowed. And the other reason is, well, frankly, do you two really expect to be helping the other? I didn't think so. Now for the fun part! >

< Your first objective will be to destroy a transponder on an asteroid. There will be opposition, naturally, but I can't tell you what to expect. I also can't tell you what your starting assets will be, but they will be similar. When this simulation is done, I'll give some time for rest and relaxation, regeneration is the concept in your minds, and then we will go on to the next scenario in the experiment series. >

< Let us begin! > A bright light enveloped the two Borg, leaving the apparently endless white plane visually empty once more.

Weapons found himself on a shuttlecraft. Federation-style he decided after a few seconds of looking around. There were swiveling seats by the front viewports near an impressive bank of instrumentation. Weapons stalked forwards, glancing out the ports momentarily before looking at the data displays and touch screens.

"Bugger this," said Weapons out loud. "I am not going to fly this thing by those inefficient means. There are other ways." Weapons put his intact hand, palm flat, on a touch screen, then consciously activated assimilation tubules. The nearly organic pieces of hardware burrowed into the console, sending out a myriad of tiny tendrils, linking Weapons directly into the computer systems of the shuttlecraft. Within seconds, Weapons' bodysense expanded as the ship's sensor grid became his primary eyes and ears and his skin strong alloy armor and electromagnetic shields. His drone-self assumed the role of brain of a shuttlecraft shaped body. Weapons could sense 89 of 300 elsewhere taking similar actions.

The asteroid belt was near. Moving closer, Weapons began to automatically dodge rocks as easily as he might climb steps between catwalk levels in the cube. The signal for the transponder beeped from a jumble of asteroids approximately one third an orbit distant. The exact location was unknowable from this range due to the amount of debris present in the same general vicinity. Trusting nothing, especially not the ease of finding the transponder, Weapons shut down all but the most basic of passive sensors as he powered engines to low impulse to chase the rock in question.

Because of the precaution, Weapons saw the picket ship before it saw him. An attack-class scout ship hung just above the surface of an asteroid, betrayed solely by a low murmur of subspace radio as the pilot talked with an unseen second ship. Weapons drifted to a halt. The beacon was still beyond, but the picket ship was a greater threat to the final outcome of the mission. The answer to the problem was elementary: Weapons attacked first.

Using the tractor, Weapons grabbed a large amount of gravel-sized rocks, sending them towards the picket ship before following directly behind. Predictably, the enemy ship fired phasers, but the gravel buffered the force sufficiently so that the shields only lost a small fraction of total power. In return Weapons unleashed the pitiful phasers of the shuttlecraft, powering straight into the throat of the picket ship. Shield contacted with shield, bouncing the other ship off the surface of the asteroid it had neglected to move away from, shattering nacelles. Atmosphere visibly leaked from a hull breach. The enemy was neutralized.

As Weapons took a minute to contemplate damage to his shuttle, he listened along the link with 89 of 300. She was cursing as she dodged among several rocks with the second known picket ship. As Weapons listened, 89 of 300 was trying to explain to the Federation guard why she wasn't a threat, and why she couldn't use visuals. The enemy wasn't buying the ruse.

Shuttle damage report concluded, Weapons reoriented himself with the transponder. It was now within 200 kilometers, deeper within the maze of tumbling asteroids. As he sent commands to the impulse engines to continue with the journey, Weapons raked the near side of the slowly rotating picket ship, melting a long scar which ended as a deliberate breach at the nose port windows. The remaining atmosphere whooshed out in a satisfactory display of transparent aluminum shards.

The robotic weapon platforms Weapons encountered ninety kilometers further into the journey barely slowed him down. Setting course straight and at high impulse, the shuttlecraft went straight between two of the platforms, absorbing phaser fire on the shields. Predictably, the shields finally buckled under the punishment, but before the automatic defenses could take advantage, Weapons was already out of range.

Elsewhere in the vicinity, 89 of 300 led her picket ship on a merry chase, eventually luring the enemy into the field of fire of the platforms. Extremely fancy maneuvering caught the picket ship in crossfire of the powerful robotic defenses. Under cover of the explosion, 89 of 300 slipped closer towards the goal...but the time wasted on the ploy left her quite behind in the race. She increased power to the engines, redlining them.

Weapons now ignored absolutely every obstacle, dodging those rocks too large to destroy with phasers. A series of cloaked mines exploded, breaching the hull. As Weapons did not need atmosphere, he ignored the damage, switching the power from the extraneous life support to weaponry.

89 of 300 slowed and began a cautious weave towards the transponder. A rock tractored and pushed in front of her shuttle cleared the way through the mines with very little damage to the ship itself. She sped up again as she passed through the dangerous field.

Laughing to himself, Weapons gave an unseen wave towards 89 of 300. He was going to win. The transponder on the asteroid was obvious as it beeped loudly in subspace frequency ranges. His direct approach was the best. Weapons was extremely surprised as the shuttle bounced off a shield he had not thought to scan for. The already quite damaged ship spun off on another vector. By the time he had stabilized the vehicle with thrusters, 89 of 300 was putting herself in orbit about the rock.

{Mine!} yelled Weapons. {I know you can hear me, 89 of 300...and the transponder is mine!} No response from 89 of 300. {Back off from the asteroid, or I'll fire on you. I got here first! You will obey me.}

{Forget it,} said 89 of 300. {Be logical...you are no threat with your ship barely functional.}

Stabilizing his own orbit, Weapons calculated an intersecting vector with 89 of 300. {And how do you plan to gain the prize?}

{Through intelligent thinking, not instinctive and trigger-happy reactions. The Borg being more than likely set up these scenario as puzzles, not the phaser gauntlet approach you took. That means the situation is not as hopeless as it seems.}

Weapons agreed, {No, it is not.} Orbits matched, Weapons threw full power to the thrusters, closing distance too quickly for 89 of 300 to make an effective response.

The nose of Weapons' shuttle hit that of 89 of 300's amidships. Locked, the two vehicles began to tumble, the few functional maneuvering thrusters on both ships in conflict as the Borg worked against each other. After several nauseating turns, Weapons finally had what was left of his shuttle lined up with the asteroid. 89 of 300, mentally sensing the action-to-be, began to protest loudly,

{No, you idiot! No! There are easier and safer ways! You are going to kill us both for no reason!}

Gleefully returned Weapons, {The objective is the reason! Ends justifies the means!}

Warp engines, carefully protected through all the abuse the shuttle had taken, powered up. The nacelles glowed brightly before pushing the unbalanced wreck which was the pair of locked ships into low warp. Unfortunately, the shielded asteroid was directly in the path, just as Weapons had calculated. The subsequent explosion not only destroyed the shuttlecraft pair and the target transponder, but every other object within one hundred kilometers.

Weapons blinked. He was still alive; with a minimum of concentration he could also feel the presence of 89 of 300. Turning, visible conformation was acquired with the other drone glaring at him.

"Dead, you hear me! We are dead! Before I was assimilated I remember thinking Borg went to Hell when they died, assuming they actually did die. I was wrong. They first go to Cube #347 and are in your hierarchy...then they go to Hell for a restful vacation."

Weapons shrugged nonchalantly. "We are obviously not dead, if you haven't noticed. And Hell is an irrelevant theology."

89 of 300's face was taking on a most unBorg tinge of red...tending towards as flushed with rage a pallid visage could become. Before the other drone could scream the bloody murder she wanted to scream and dismantle the obstinate Weapons to pieces, the voice of Bob spoke,

< Excuse me. Could I have your attention? > The unseen presence waited a minute or so before continuing on.

< I am appalled, > came the thought of Bob, directed at Weapons. < The sheer

viciousness and single-minded pursuit of violence towards a goal makes you unfit to continue in my experiments as a subject. In all my time as a self-aware entity, I have seen many things, but nothing so cold-blooded as your actions. And to think they were premeditated! You knew exactly what you were doing at all times, but you just didn't care what happened to yourself or the others around you. >

< Weapons, I am forced to return you to your ship. I think they would be better off, and certainly safer, if I were to simply destroy you. However, my beliefs do not include wanton termination of living creatures. Therefore, I hope one day you will discover the folly of your ways, before it is too late for you and your comrades. >

Bob shifted his attention to 89 of 300. < 89 of 300, you are a suitable subject for continued study. Unfortunately, you would not be able to be returned to your ship as I need a second linear, sentient corporal for my research. The population I drew you from is more than likely polluted to some extent by Weapons' mind, as it is a psuedohive mentality. > Weapons protested, but was ignored.

< That would mean I would need to put you in another fractal reality, one where time moves much slower than in subjective reality. It will probably be many decades, even centuries, before another suitable ship enters the system. If you were not stored, you would more than likely die of old age. That in itself is an interesting line of corporal research, but not one which is a part of my thesis. >

89 of 300 asked, "One question: I would not have to deal with Weapons again?"

< No. He will more than likely be dead long before I need you again. A long time with his current mind set. For you, only a short time will have passed...perhaps hours? A few days at most. >

"Done."

Before Weapons could say anything in his defense, he was whisked off in a flash of bright light.

Sensors muttered over the net, {Sensors says that is [silly]. The one interesting item in this system, and it disappears. Not just the signal, but the whole [blob]. Sensors suspects some unknown spatial phenomenon.}

Dazedly, Weapons found himself back in his alcove as if he had never left. His experiences almost immediately leaked into the sub-collective, although as his mind began to register the reality about himself, he started to mentally edit some parts, especially those that had to do with Bob's estimation of his capacity of violence and self-destructive behavior. What did a noncorporal being that evolved around a black hole really know about beings like himself, especially those augmented with Borg technology? Nothing!

As the cube digested the new information, Captain called to Weapons, {89 of 300 will not be coming back? I felt her severance with this cube at the same time the asteroid disappeared, and the Greater Consciousness will be demanding answers as to how we lost a drone.}

{She will not be returning. And we can truthfully say 89 of 300 was taken without by a being beyond our ability to give protest towards.}

{And this had absolutely nothing to do with her challenging of your position?}

{Absolutely nothing.}

The more he put it in perspective, the more Weapons convinced himself the Bob entity was not qualified to make psyche judgment calls. The only thing which had been profitable about

the whole experience was the ideas for new directions to explore with Federation scenarios. As the cube completed its scrutiny of the system before leaving for the next in the search, Weapons began happily setting up a new BorgCraft battle simulation.